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Good Actions

We have enjoined man to show kindness to his parents. With much pain his mother bears him, and with much pain she brings him into the world. He is born and weaned in thirty months. When he grows to manhood and attains his fortieth year, let him say: 'Inspire me, Lord, to give thanks for the favours You have bestowed on me and on my parents, and to do good works that will please You. Grant me good descendants. To You I turn and to You I surrender myself.'

Such are those from whom We will accept their noblest works and whose misdeeds We shall overlook. (We shall include them) among the people of Paradise: true is the promise that has been given them (46:15-16).

A new human generation comes into existence with each child born of a man and a woman. This child, cared for and nourished by its parents, grows up to be a fully rounded human being. This is a system devised by nature for the nurturing of human life. Its purpose is to inculcate in man a proper sense of rights and duties; to produce such feelings within man as will make him grateful to his benefactors and pay homage to them. This feeling tells man, on the one hand, to fulfill his obligations to those who have helped him to grow up and, on the other, to pay the far greater dues to his Creator and Sustainer.

Those who learn such lessons from nature as make them thoroughly aware of what is due to their parents and to God and act accordingly, are the people who will be deserving of God's eternal blessings in the life to come.

Home serves as the first training ground for man and this training, which starts with the parents; later extends to the whole of society. If man fully accepts such training from the outset, he will be morally equipped not only to give human beings their due, but also to render to God what he owes Him in the vaster sense.

Divine Planning

The facts unraveled about the universe through modern scientific studies have definitively brought to an end the age of superstition. These newly discovered realities have simultaneously benefited humanity in two ways, one being that religious beliefs are no longer just dogma but facts established through human knowledge itself.

The other benefit to mankind is that these scientific revelations about nature provide an immense source for increasing the faith of the believer.

Although partial in extent, whatever has been revealed by science regarding the universe is so amazing that, on learning it, the believer's hair stands on end. His mind receives the light of the realization of the Lord. His eyes become wet with tears from awe and fear of God. He is elevated to the plan of *ihsan*, a state of worship in which man feels as if he is seeing the Almighty. There is a hadith to this effect, asking the believers to worship God as if they were actually seeing Him.

Revival of Islam in the Modern Age

In modern times the history of human belief has once again reached almost the point that it was at fifteen hundred years ago. In ancient times *shirk* so dominated human thought that it became an inseparable part of the historical process, leading to a situation where every child born was an idolater. Now, by a process spanning the last several hundred years, atheistic thoughts have come to vitiate human thinking. In all intellectual activities atheistic thinking has so prevailed that once again in human history atheism has set in as a historical process. Now every child born in any part of the world is under its influence. Atheism is the dominant "religion" of today. Hence the revival of Islam in modern times will not be possible so long as atheism continues to enjoy its ideological dominance.

To render the revival of Islam possible in modern times, it will be necessary to employ the same methods as were formerly adopted when *shirk* dominated world thought, i.e., the conditioning of individuals and the subjugation of the opponents of truth.

For the first task to be accomplished, our own human resources are sufficient. But for the other task, God has once again in modern times, just as in the first phase of Islam, taken appropriate measures on a very large scale. The need of the hour is to exploit these opportunities so abundantly created for us.

1. A workforce is a pre-requisite for the successful outcome of any Islamic revival campaign at the present time. The basics are the same as those needed to execute the mission entrusted to Abraham, although the training of the individuals may differ in view of the requirements of our age.

The individuals required for launching a campaign of Islamic revival in modern times are not just

ordinary Muslims, but those for whom Islam has become the ultimate answer to a great exploratory quest. What activates a person more than anything is this event of discovery: all of a sudden a new personality is born within him, marked by conviction, courage, determination, manliness, generosity, the spirit of sacrifice and the desired unity – all qualities required for the performance of great tasks, and all part of the questing spirit.

All the best qualities found in western nations in modern times are linked with this urge to explore. The western nations may be said to have discovered the world in the scientific as opposed to the traditional sense, and it is this urge to understand all aspects of truth which has produced individuals of such high calibre in western nations.

The same was true of the companions of the Prophet in the first phase of Islam. God's religion came to them as a discovery: Islam as against *jahiliyah* (period of ignorance); monotheism as against *shirk*; *Akhirah* (Hereafter) as against this present world. It was this which was responsible for producing those extraordinary qualities in them. If today the campaign of Islamic revival is to be effectively launched once again, such people will have to come forward as conceive of Islam as a fresh discovery rather than as an inheritance by birth.

2. Islam came to the world fourteen hundred years ago, setting in motion historical processes marked by cultural grandeur and political conquests. Those who call themselves Muslims today are the products of those processes. But any group of people which has such a brilliant past is invariably preoccupied with its recent history. It fails to go back through history to drink afresh from the original springs of inspiration.

This is true of Muslims today. The Muslims of present times, consciously or unconsciously, are deriving their religion from history instead of from the Qur'an and *Sunnah*, the true sources of Islam.

This is why Islam has become for the Muslims of today a matter not of responsibility but of pride. This psychology so pervades their thoughts and actions that its effects are visible everywhere. Islam as set forth in the Qur'an and the hadith stands out as a religion of responsibility and accountability, but if viewed in the mirror of its cultural and political history, it appears to be an object of pride and glory. All the great revolutionary movements of Muslims in modern times have been influenced by this sense of pride. That is why they all lost their original lustre after very brief periods of activity. This is because a sense of pride leads one to showy activities, while a sense of accountability leads one to genuinely serious action.

For any campaign of Islamic revival to be effectively managed, its promoters should have derived Islam from the original teachings in the Qur'an and the hadith rather than from the cultural and political history of later times. Only those who have derived their religion from the Qur'an and the hadith can sustain a true campaign in all seriousness and with a sense of responsibility.

Those who derive their religion from history will only glorify their own sense of pride, and no result-oriented action will follow from their activities.

Muslims in modern times have turned into a defeatist nation, thanks to the entire Muslim world suffering from a persecution complex. This is what ensues from deriving religion from history. Awed by the grandeur of the history of the "Red Fort" and "Granada", they chose to derive their Islamic identity from these objects of historical significance, and since in present times these things have been taken over by other nations, they have never ceased in their lamentations. Yet, if they had considered divine guidance to be their religion, they would never have felt themselves the victims of deprivation. For divine guidance is something which can never be taken away by anyone.

Since we consider those things to be Islam, which may be taken away by others, we have become compulsive bewailers of our own fates. How strange it is that we are engaged in lamenting over a very small loss, and demanding reparations, while completely unaware of the far greater treasure of which we are still in possession.

Muslims consider Islam as an emblem of their national greatness, and as a result of this mentality, they are engaged in clash and confrontation with other nations all over the world. That is why, when they find people robbing them of their glory, they rise against them. This reaction can range from verbal castigation to armed confrontation. This negative attitude continues to mar Muslim relations with others. Whereas, if they had received Islam as a matter of divine guidance, they would have felt that they had something to give to other nations. They would have considered themselves as the giver and the others as the taker. They would not then have become obsessed with recovering the irretrievable. The actual relationship between Muslims and other nations should be that of *da'i* and *mad'u*, not of depriver and deprived. But the result of holding the historical Islam to be the true Islam is that other nations are now seen simply as rivals. So long as this rivalry continues between Muslims and other nations, no real work of Islamic revival can be started.

It is not possible in the very first stage to cleanse all Muslims of this antagonistic psychology. Yet at least one such team should be assembled, the members of which have rid themselves of this mentality of rivalry. This transformation in thinking will help them to regard other nations as their *mad'u*, instead of as their material competitors and national adversaries. To establish the relation of *da'i* and *mad'u*, it is essential to forget all complaints and grudges, and to be willing to bear all kinds of material losses. This relation of *da'i* and *mad'u* can be founded only on the basis of unilateral sacrifice on the part of *the da'i*. There is no doubt about it that this is the most difficult of tasks, one for which one has to forfeit a great deal.

The willingness to make sacrifices and other such attributes must be possessed by those who come forward for the mission of Islamic revival. For the preparation of such individuals in modern times, again the same planning is required as was carried out in the first phase.

In modern times we are in need of a high standard training centre with all the latest facilities. Set up in the pure surroundings of nature, far from the corrupting centres of civilization, such a training centre would respond fully to this exhortation of the Qur'an;

... some should stay behind to instruct themselves in religion and admonish the others when they return, so that they may take heed (9:122).

The training of talented individuals in such an isolated location would be the equivalent of the setting of Hagar and Ismael in barren, uncultivable terrain, so that their religiosity would grow and be strengthened.

For this proposed training centre to give the maximum benefit, parents like Abraham should be willing to sacrifice talented children, in the sense of taking them away from the lure of economic opportunities and putting them in surroundings where, even by giving of their best, they would have nothing in return save the concept of reward in the Hereafter. The successful running of such a training centre would be akin, in the words of Philip Hitti, to producing a nursery of heroes.

But unless a considerable number of such individuals are made available, no real steps can be taken towards the revival of Islam. That is to say, a group of intelligent, talented individuals of the nation should be brought to a different, special environment, set apart from mundane things, where they are given training and education specially to prepare them to successfully undertake the revival of Islam in modern times, thus becoming warners and givers of good tidings for the peoples of the world.

In order to facilitate the Islamic revolution in its first phase, God made the special provision of setting the mighty Roman and Persian empires – the greatest opponents of monotheism – on a collision course, and consequently weakening them so considerably that it became easy for the Muslims to subjugate them.

This same succour of God for the believers has taken another form in modern times, i.e. the flow of such information about the universe as proves religious realities at the level of miracles. The superstitious way of thinking dominated the world in ancient times, as a result of which man had formed strange opinions about divine creation. The universe has been called the 'miracle of God' in the Qur'an. But this divine miracle lay hidden under the veil of superstition. One of the results of the Islamic revolution is that the phenomena of nature, which had been subjects of worship, now became subjects of research and investigation. In this way, for the first time in human history, the occurrences of nature began to be studied in a purely academic manner. This fresh approach went on gaining ground until it spread to Europe where it was given the great boost which helped it develop into the scientific revolution of modern times.

It is as if science, having removed the veil of superstition, has proved the miracle of the universe to be a miracle of God. By displacing the phenomena of nature from the status of objects of worship, man has ultimately been able to set his foot on this moon, which has been worshipped throughout human history from the time of ancient man, who considered it as an object of divinity.

If the new arguments furnished by science are properly employed, the call of monotheism can be presented to the world on the same, if not a greater scale, than that for which miracles had earlier been given to the prophets as a testament to the uniqueness of the Creator.

All things of the heavens and the earth are there to remind man of God. But man on his own began to deify those things. This was a major deviation from God's original intention.

In modern times we have witnessed another kind of deviation as regards scientific information. The facts that have come to light through scientific investigations are all proofs of the divinity of God. They are there to remind man of God. But the atheists of modern times have distorted those very revelations of science, which were proofs of the existence of God, to show that there is no God. By giving the wrong direction to these facts, it was held that the entire system functioned on its own through a mechanical process of action and reaction, cause and effect.

The universe discovered by science was, however, an extremely meaningful and purposeful universe, as modern discoveries have shown: it is not a haphazard assemblage of matter. Rather it is a highly organized and sophisticated factory of a very superior standard. All the things of the world inevitably move along the purpose-oriented course which will produce the best results. The discovery of organization and purposefulness in all things is certain proof that the hand of God, albeit invisible, is behind the working of the universe. But what the atheist thinkers did was divert the course of scientific discovery towards atheism. They held that whatever has been proved is an end and not the cause. But what is the proof that it is an end? It is quite possible that it may simply be an effect. The atheists nevertheless maintain that, it is not necessary that there must be a mind which, through will, is guiding events deliberately towards a particular end or conclusion; it may be possible that, through the blind, interplay of some physical and chemical forces, certain things on their own are being produced which may, by chance, be meaningful. When this meaningless explanation itself has been produced through the exercise of will (human will in this instance), how strange it would be to believe in the functioning of a meaningful universe without a will behind it.

After the emergence of science, atheist thinkers have, on a very large scale, attempted to point science in the direction of atheism. On the contrary, the attempts of religious thinkers to utilize scientific evidence to support the claims of religion have been extremely few and far between. Over the last one hundred years thousands of books of a high academic standard have come out which aim, quite wrongly of course, at producing atheism out of science, while few academic efforts worth mentioning have been made on the part of religious thinkers. One of these books, *The Mysterious Universe*, by Sir James Jeans, is notable for the impact it has had on both religious and scientific thinking. In this book the author has ably demolished through purely scientific arguments, the principle of causation as the acceptance of the mechanical substitute for God.

In the latter half of the present century innumerable new facts have come to the knowledge of man, which prove the truth of religious beliefs on an extremely elevated plane. But so far no religious thinker has come forward to harness this scientific information in support of religious truths. If this work could be performed at a high intellectual level, it would amount to an academic miracle in support of the religion of monotheism.

As we learn from the Qur'an, the prophethood of all the prophets of the past was doubted by their contemporaries (11:62). Initially, the same fate befell the Prophet Muhammad, (38:10).

However, the Qur'an declared: 'Your Lord may exalt you to a position of praise and glory', (17:79). This divine proclamation meant that his prophethood would pass from the stage of doubt to the stage of full acceptance. The stage of *Mahmud* (worthy of praise) is the final stage of recognition and acknowledgement.

Whenever a Prophet is born, his good faith becomes a subject of doubt to his people. "Is he really a prophet, or does he just claim to be one?" To the end, such thoughts keep coming to people's minds. Prophethood, in its initial stage, is merely a claim. It has no such in-built proof as people will be forced to acknowledge.

That is why, whenever a prophet comes to any community, he becomes in their eyes a controversial personality, established historical proofs not having been gathered in his support. Supportive arguments do come into existence, but always only after a certain time has elapsed. Generally, the prophets did not reach this second stage of full acceptance.

All other prophets came to the world and also left the world in what was a period of controversy. They were not, therefore, able to leave behind them a group of sincere and dedicated individuals who could preserve their traditions and prophetic sayings. If these prophets were never wholly acknowledged by their contemporaries, either at the outset or in the later stages of their careers, it was because their teachings were never fully borne out by advances in human knowledge.

Of all the prophets, the only exception in this respect is that of the Final Prophet, although, like the other prophets, he too began his prophethood amidst controversy. It was at a later stage that he achieved such extraordinary success, and along with his companions, came to hold sway over a major part of the globe. In a period of less than a century his religion, Islam, had subjugated the great empires of Asia and Africa.

The Prophet of Islam emerged successful in all the challenges he faced: all his predictions proved true and all the powers that confronted him were vanquished. These events during his lifetime established his reputation not just in the eyes of his contemporaries, but for all time to come. Throughout the history of the prophets he alone secured such extraordinary success that his prophethood soon left all controversy behind, reaching the stage of firm establishment referred to in the Qur'an as *mahmud*. His sayings as well as his achievements remained so perfectly preserved that there could be no room for any doubt.

In the present world the *da'is* of the True Religion have an exclusive advantage such as no other *da'i* group had ever possessed in the earlier phases of Islam history. That is, we are in a position to present the call to monotheism before the world from the pre-eminent position of established prophethood.

God has provided all kinds of favourable opportunities for presenting the divine message before the nations of the world. If in spite of all such provisions, Muslims do not perform this task of bearing witness to the Truth, or if they engage in communal, political and worldly disputes with other nations, they will find themselves on the Day of Judgement in the serious predicament of being unable to justify this lapse before their Lord and Creator.

Pillars of Islam

Abdullah Bin Umar said that the Messenger of Allah said: The foundation of Islam has been laid on five principles; to bear witness that there is no God but Allah and that Muhammad (may peace be upon him) is His prophet; to offer prayer (Namaz); to give alms (Zakat); to perform Haj and to keep fast during Ramzan.

According to this Hadith, these five principles form the pillars of Islam. Like a mansion stands on pillars so does Islamic faith on these tenets. Outwardly these five principles are names given to certain practices, like, to repeat the words accepting the oneness of God and the prophethood of Muhammad (may peace be upon him), to go through the rituals of the prayers (Namaz), to give the prescribed amount of alms (Zakat), to perform the Haj and to observe the fast of Ramzan. But the manifestation of these rituals is not the sole aim; it is spirit behind them which is the real aim. Outward manifestation is just one part of the truth, the best way to observe these rituals is in which you get to the reality.

The same principle applies to the other things in this world as well. Take the telephone for instance. As everyone knows the telephone has a definite form. But the form itself is not what is expected of a telephone. Telephone for the sake of telephone is meaningless. Telephone is meant for establishing contact. When you say that you have a telephone it does not imply that you have the shell of a telephone. What it really means is that you have an instrument through which you can establish contact anywhere in the world and talk to distant people.

The same thing applies to the five principles of Islam. These principles are principles of Islam only as long as their manifestation and spirit are interwoven. Without the spirit, the form is as good as its not being there at all

The spirit of Faith. This is the first pillar of Islam. For its manifestation one is required to utter his faith in oneness of God and the prophethood of Muhammad. But its spirit lies in its acceptance. Through this article of faith a man accepts God and all His attributes. He also accepts that God has sent Muhammad (may peace be upon him) to this world as the eternal guide for all the mankind. If this reality reaches one's heart, it becomes a part of his being. His heart opens to the truth and reality. He is transformed into a man who will overcome any obstacle to reach the truth.

The spirit of Salah. Its manifestation is the daily five times prayers but the spirit is humility. A man performing the salah bows before his Creator and thereby creates a sense of humility within himself. A man who is fired by this spirit, will be devoid of pride and ego. He will develop a quality of humility and will be far removed from false sense of pride and importance.

The spirit of Zakat. Its manifestation is giving a fixed amount in alms annually, but the spirit behind is the service of mankind. A man who gives alms will develop a zeal in himself to do good to the others. He would like to live a life which is most useful to the others.

The spirit of Haj. Its manifestation is the annual ritual. But its spirit is the unity and solidarity. A man who performs the Haj in its real spirit, will do away with the feelings of opposition. He will live in unity and harmony even in the face of provocation.

The spirit of Fasting. Its manifestation is fasting in the month of Ramzan. But the spirit is to endure. A man who keeps fast will soon learn to tolerate even unpleasant situations. He will ignore what may be objectionable and concentrate on positive aspects of the matter.

Those who adhere to these five pillars of Islam only to the extent of their manifestations, will find that their lives are devoid of the spirit of these pillars.

For example they will repeat the words accepting the oneness of God and the prophethood of Muhammad, but beyond these words when they are confronted with truth, they will not accept it, because they have not understood the spirit of what they repeat. They will go through the ritual of prayer (Namaz) but once outside the mosque they will not be able to display the humility in their interaction with others. The reason for this is that they have not imbibed the spirit of Namaz.

Likewise those who take out a fixed amount as alms (Zakat), will not show any compassion while dealing with others. Because the spirit of Zakat is missing. They will go for Haj, perform the rituals and come back. But they will not be ready to ignore the complaints of the others and forge a unity because the true spirit of Haj has not touched them. During the month of Ramzan, they will keep the ritual fast. But when they are required to show patience, they will be found lacking. They will be easily provoked. The reason for this is that they have not understood the spirit behind the fasting.

Anyone who has adhered to the five pillars of Islam is a faithful and a Muslim. He has made himself entitled to God's bounty, in this world as well as in the world hereafter. But the five pillars of Islam have to be accepted in their manifestations and spirits. The rewards which have been promised are for their complete and not partial adherence.

After rising from sleep in the morning

Islam teaches us that when a man rises from sleep early in the morning, he should first of all thank God for having given him sound sleep and making the sun rise so that he may perform his life's duties in the sunlight.

The next thing a believer must do in the morning is to perform his ablutions (wudu) or if possible take a bath in order to cleanse himself, and then he must say the fajr prayer, the first prayer of the day. After this first prayer he should engage himself in other daily activities, keeping the teaching of Islam before him at all times. Instead of being led by his desires, he should follow God's commands.

Assalamu Alaikum

Islam teaches Muslims to greet their brothers when they meet them, by saying Assalamu alaikum that is, peace be upon you. According to the Islamic code of behaviour, when a Muslim meets another Muslim brother, he should greet him with these words 'peace be upon him or you' and the other person must say in return, 'And peace be upon you too'.

This greeting is a form of prayer. A believer is the well wisher of other believers. He has good feelings in his heart for others. He even keeps praying for them in his hours of privacy. As such on meeting them, this inner feeling of well-wishing finds expression in the form of these words of greeting; Peace be upon you.

The phrase 'Assalamu Alaikum' is an expression of the kind of life that an individual ought to lead in society. Everyone must live in this world as the well-wisher of others, desiring peace and security for all. By greeting others with this phrase, one introduces oneself as just such a well-wisher, one from whom no harm may be expected. This greeting truly symbolizes an attitude of peace and goodwill towards all human beings.

The greeting Assalamu Alaikum is not a mere ritual repetition of certain set words. It is, in fact, a sacred covenant by which one leads a principled life. Its utterance is an indication that the speaker would observe the spirit of this phrase – the spirit of peace and good will towards all.

Bismillahir Rahmanir Raheem

Islam teaches us to begin all work in the name of God, the most merciful, the most beneficent. According to the Prophet of Islam, any task which has not been started by taking the name of God is not well founded.

This phrase reminds man that the world which is his centre of activity, was created by a God who is helpful to man by being all-merciful and all-compassionate etc. Therefore, we must begin our work by remembering God and seeking His help.

When a man has found God, he becomes immersed in His greatness. He knows that all power belongs to God, and that it is God alone who can give and take away. Reciting the phrase, "In the name of God, the most merciful the most beneficent" is, in actual fact, an expression of this feeling of the believer. It is an acknowledgment of God's godhead. It is remembrance of God in one's inner most being. It is a way of seeking the help of God, the Almighty.

The man who starts work without taking the name of God acts safely on the basis of his own strength, whereas one who begins his work after taking the name of God has the support of the Almighty's power. Where the former has no certainty of reaching his goal the latter is like a passenger traveling steadily along the right path and that one day he will definitely reach his destination.

God is the greatest reality of the universe. After having realized this reality, man gives expression to it in verbal form by using this phrase.

Cleanliness in Islam

Islam, as we learn from the Qur'an and Hadith, is a religion of nature. Islam and nature being indeed each other's counterparts. Nature loves cleanliness and abhors pollution: that is why this highly desirable feature of human existence – cleanliness – is one of the basic tenets of the Islamic faith.

What is the nature of that faith? It is to lead a life in total consonance with the will of God. And such a life can have its beginnings only in a condition of exemplary personal hygiene. According to a *hadith*, the *keeping of oneself clean is one half of faith*; this indicates the amount of emphasis laid upon hygiene in Islamic practice. The cleanliness factor is thus a major segment of the very essence of Islam.

This is clearly in evidence at the appointed times of worship – the most sublime form of worship being *salat (namaz)* which is engaged in five times a day. Each time the hour of prayer arrives the first thing the good Muslim must do is perform his ablution. Ablution (*wudu*) entails the washing of all the exposed parts of the body. As a cleansing process, *wudu* is the equivalent of a half bath. In this way, the devout Muslim takes a half bath five times daily.

In the first phase of Islam, it was common practice for Muslims to take a bath daily before the *fajr* (dawn) prayers. Bathing thus became a regular daily feature of every Muslim's life. The servant of Uthman, the third Caliph, tells of how the Caliph used unfailingly to take a bath once or twice daily. If Muslims have always attached great importance to cleanliness, it is because of the explicit commands on this subject in the Qur'an. When the Qur'an began to be revealed, one of its signal injunctions was: "Cleanse your garments and keep away from all pollution," (74:4).

The cleanliness of clothes is a necessary concomitant of the purity of the body. Without that, the body is not one hundred per cent clean. Indeed, as much stress is laid on cleanliness as on the avoidance of wearing showy apparel. In Islam, the devotee is required, ideally to worship in clothes which are simple, and above all, clean.

In the realm of spiritual development, one of the principal elements is purification through penitence. As the Qur'an says; "God loves those who turn to Him in repentance and purify themselves," (2:222). Just as repentance frees body and soul of worldly moral dross, so does water remove impurities from body and clothing. Islam, accordingly, exhorts every Muslim, on the one hand, to keep his clothes and body clean with water and, on the other to turn in remembrance to God, thus purifying his soul.

The Mosque, the focal point of Islamic life, is called in a *hadith* the "home of the pious people." As the Qur'an puts it: "There you shall find men who would keep pure. God loves those who purify themselves" (9:108). We are asked, therefore, to clean the mosque, ridding it of noise and dust, just as Abraham and Ishmael have enjoined "to cleanse Our House (the Kabah) for those who walk around it, who meditate in it, and who kneel and prostrate themselves," (2:125).

Following the examples of the sanitizing of the mosque, Muslims are urged to keep their bodies pure by ablution and bathing, their clothes clean by regular washing and their houses and their surrounding spotless. These practices are incumbent upon every Muslim.

According to a *hadith*, the Prophet Muhammad said, “God is pure and loves purity,” which means that cleanliness and purity are on the highest scale of cardinal virtues. What God loves is undoubtedly of supreme value. Every Muslim must, in consequence, lead a life marked by its cleanliness and purity in order to earn the approval of his Creator.

On Islam and Jihad

A perusal of the Qur'an followed by a study of latter-day Muslim history will reveal a blatant contradiction between the two – that of principle and practice. Where recent developments in some Muslim countries bespeak the culture of war, the Qur'an, on the contrary, is imbued with the spirit of tolerance. Its culture is not that of war, but of mercy.

At the very beginning of the Qur'an, the first invocation reads: "In the name of God, the most Merciful, the most Beneficent. Throughout the Qur'an, this verse is repeated for no less than 114 times. Even one of God's name is As-Salam. Moreover, the Qur'an states that the Prophet of Islam was sent to the world *as a mercy to the people* (21:107).

The word 'jihad' has nowhere been used in the Qur'an to mean war in the sense of launching an offensive. It is used rather to mean 'struggle'. The action most consistently called for in the Qur'an is the exercise of patience. Yet today, the 'Muslim Mujahideen' under unfavourable conditions have equated "God is Great" with "War is Great." For them, the greatest reward is to be able to wield a Kalashnikov rifle.

In the light of on-going conflict, we must ask why so great a contradiction has arisen between the principles of Islam and the practices of Muslims. At least one root-cause may be traced to historical exigency.

Since time immemorial, military commanders have been accorded positions of great eminence in the annals of history. It is a universal phenomenon that the hero is idolized even in peace time and becomes a model for the people. It is this placing of heroism in the militaristic context which has been the greatest underlying factor in the undue stress laid on war in the latter phase of Islam's history. With the automatic accord in Muslim society of a place of honour and importance to the heroes of the battlefield, annalists' subsequent compilations of Islamic history have tended to read like an uninterrupted series of wars and conquests.

These early chronicles having set the example, subsequent writings on Islamic history have followed the same pattern of emphasis on militarism. The Prophet's biographies were called '*maghazi*', that is 'The Battles Fought by the Prophet,' yet the Prophet Muhammad in fact did battle only three times in his entire life, and the period of his involvement in these battles did not total more than one and a half days. He fought, let it be said, in self-defence, when hemmed in by aggressors, where he simply had no option. But historians – flying in the face of fact – have converted his whole life into one of confrontation and war.

We must keep it in mind that the Prophet Muhammad was born at a time when an atmosphere of militancy prevailed in the Arab society. There being, in their view, no other path to justice. But the

Prophet always opted for avoidance of conflict. For instance, in the campaign of Ahzab, the Prophet advised his Companions to dig a trench between them and the enemies, thus preventing a head-on clash.

Another well-known instance of the Prophet's dislike for hostilities is the Hudaibiyyah peace treaty made by accepting, unilaterally, all the conditions of the enemy. In the case of the conquest of Mecca, he avoided a battle altogether by making a rapid entry into the city with ten thousand Muslims – a number large enough to awe his enemies into submission.

In this way, on all occasions, the Prophet endeavoured to achieve his objectives by peaceful rather than by war-like means. It is, therefore, unconscionable that in later biographical writing, all the events of his life have been arranged under the heading of 'battles' (*ghazawat*). How he managed to avert the cataclysms of war has not been dealt with in any of the works which purportedly depict his life.

Ibn Khaldun, the celebrated 14th century historian, was the first to lay down definite rules for the study and writing of history and sociology. He followed the revolutionary course of attempting "to present history as a chronicle of events centering on the common man rather than on kings, their generals and the battles they fought. But since war heroes were already entrenched as the idols of society, the caravan of writers and historians continued to follow the same well-worn path as had been trodden prior to Ibn Khaldun. When people have come to regard war heroes as the greatest of men, it is but natural that it is the events of the battlefield which will be given the greatest prominence in works of history. All other events will either be relegated to the background or omitted altogether.

In the later phase of Islam, there came into existence a powerful group of Sufis – many of them great men, who exerted their influence on a multitude of people, their goal being to put an end to this contradiction between the tenets of Islam and Muslim conduct: they at least wanted to strike a balance between the two. But the Sufis failed in this, the principal reason being that they expressed themselves in terms of dreams and the realization of inspiration. The militant interpretation of Islam, on the contrary, was ostensibly based on history and knowledge. Dreams and personal realizations could, therefore, never adequately counter what had come to be regarded as hard facts. Objective reasoning cannot be bested by subjective postulations, and so the Sufis failed to establish the equilibrium between precept and practice which they so ardently desired.

In the past when the sword was the only weapon of war, militancy did not lead to the mass-scale loss of life and property such as modern warfare brings in its wake. In former times, fighting was confined to the battlefield; the only sufferers were those engaged in the battle. But today, the spear and sword have been replaced by megabombs and devastating long-range missiles, so that killing and destruction take place on a horrendous scale. It is the entire human settlement which has now become the global arena of war. Even the air we breathe and the water we drink are left polluted in war's aftermath.

Hence people in the West find Islam outdated and irrelevant precisely because of its militant interpretation. Demands for a reform in Islam are on the increase, as the 'old' version of Islam cannot apparently keep pace with the modern world.

But, in reality, it is not reformation but revival which is required. What is needed is to discard as superficial and erroneous the militant and political interpretation of Islam, and to adopt the original, 'old' version of Islam based on peace, mercy and the love of mankind.

The so-called Muslim Mujahideen have been exhorting their co-religionists to do battle all over the world. But the Qur'an says: ' ... and God calls to the home of peace' (10:25). It is up to right-thinking people everywhere to disregard the Mujahideen call, and to start seeing and accepting Islam as it is truly represented by the Qur'an.

Fight the Forces of Evil with Love

In situations of adversity, head-on confrontation, as a means of eliminating opposition, is frequently resorted to. As a negative reaction, it is almost always counterproductive. Experience shows, oftener than not, that the better way is to take positive action. That is, to return good for evil.

This argument is borne out by the history of the Indian minorities. Subsequent to 1947, for certain reasons, the majority community bore a grudge against the Muslim minority, which culminated in serious communal conflict. The first instance – in a residual climate of post-Partition agitation – occurred in a North Indian city. Members of the majority community, participants in a religious procession, began shouting, *Mulla, jao Pakistan!* (Muslims, go back to Pakistan!) as they approached a mosque in a Muslim locality. A group of Muslim youths retaliated. The result? Bloody riots, the loss of precious lives and damage to crores worth of property.

Hordes of leaders then poured into the affected area, gathered Muslims together and made such fiery speeches against the majority community as convinced their hearers that they had been genuinely justified in their hot-headed reaction to the slogans. This conviction then launched them on a course which only triggered countless clashes between Hindus and Muslims. It was a chain reaction to which there seemed to be no end. Ironically, the Muslims themselves – being the weaker group – were the greatest losers. Perhaps the greater irony was that the leaders remained personally unaffected by the riots, and, wasted no time in making political capital out of them to form vote banks. Subsequently, they missed no opportunity to collect huge funds in the name of “relief.”

After making an in-depth study of this issue, I have concluded that the riots should be treated not as a communal evil, but as a human problem, and ways and means should be found to solve it peacefully. The Hindus should not, in fact, be regarded as adversaries, but as fellow countrymen. Once seen in this light, the problem ought then to be solvable in a well-reasoned and peaceable manner. Two rules Muslims should observe is to refrain from interfering with Hindu processions and to stifle their reactions to provocative slogans.

In a similar situation, identical advice was given to Muslims in the Qur'an in Islam's early stages: “Repel evil with good and he between whom and you was enmity will become your dearest friend.” (Quran, 41:35).

Through the media and at public meetings, I have continuously campaigned against unreason and violence and in favour of constructive action. Like any initiative of this sort, it took time to bear fruit. But, finally, by 1993, Muslim attitudes began to change, and now, by the grace of God, there has been a nation-wide adoption of a non-confrontational approach. The Muslims' immediate gain is the almost

total cessation of riots. Attitudes will no doubt change even further with their heightened awareness of the need for a better education and more concerted efforts to establish themselves in all constructive fields.

Example of Christian Community

By the end of 1998, albeit for different reasons, the Christian community were subjected to violence in several states. One of the most deplorable incidents was the burning alive by extremists, of a Christian missionary, Graham Stewart Stains, and his sons in the village of Manoharpur in Orissa in January 99. His widow, Gladys Stains, evinced the true Christian spirit when, in response to this horrendous tragedy, she said. "May God forgive the killers. May God touch and liberate their hearts through love."

But those who are advising the Christians to take the course of confrontation have nothing to do with the true Christian spirit. Urging the Christians to fight the forces of evil is, to my way of thinking, not only against reason, but also against the teachings of Christianity. It would be nothing short of telling them to commit suicide. Communities should be lead, not mislead.

I would like to stress that the advice to enter into confrontation is reactionary and quite contrary to the message of Christ. Christ and his followers were faced with a far severer kind of persecution. Then what was the key to success given by Christ? According to the New Testament, Christ's guidance took the shape of a three-point formula:

- Render to Caesar what is due to Caesar and render to God what is due to God – that is, follow the policy of avoidance of those who are in power instead of pursuing the policy of confrontation with them, and concentrate your efforts on non-political spheres.
- One who seeks your shirt, let him have your cloak also—that is, whenever faced with any form of conflict, do not insist on a bilateral solution. That is, put an end to the conflict unilaterally, at the very outset.
- Love your enemy – that is, take your enemy as your potential friend. The response of the believers should not be that of dividing people into two dichotomous groups – friends and enemies. They should not regard hostility to be a permanent state of affairs and then start on a collision course bred out of hatred. Rather by means of good, positive behaviour, all efforts should be made to turn the enemy into one's friend. Thus Christ enjoined his followers to love the enemy, that is, to turn your enemy into your friend through the demonstration of love. The two-thousand year old history of the Christians tells us that whenever they have found success, it was not achieved by fighting against evil, but by following the above teachings of Christ.

For instance, in its early days in Palestine, there was formidable opposition to Christianity by the Jewish community, leading to an exodus of Christians to surrounding countries. If Christianity then began spreading there, it was not because the Christians launched violent campaigns against the Jews, but because, in their new homelands, they practised love and service to the people.

Later, persecuted by Rome, they did not fight back, but bore with injustice patiently, while never ceasing to spread the message of love. The Roman emperor himself was led to embrace Christianity in 337 A.D. Thereafter, Christianity spread all over Europe. Formerly a local cult, it now became an international religion.

Conversely, when the Christians chose to diverge from their principles – in the 200 year long Crusades – their efforts came to naught with their ultimate defeat by the Muslims. However, with the end of the Crusades came a change of heart and a reversal of policy. Now groups of Christians devoted themselves to reviving the true spirit of Christianity. Other groups made forays into the peaceful field of scientific research. Books in Arabic and other languages were translated on a large scale into European languages, making a major contribution to the Renaissance. The Christian nations of Europe may have suffered defeat in war, but in the field of knowledge and spirituality they emerged victorious, ushering in a new era in history known as the age of scientific revolution.

In conclusion, my advice to both Christians and Muslims is to be creative and constructive, practicing love rather than hatred. In that way, in the eyes of the nation, they will become assets rather than liabilities.

An Earthquake

When the earth is rocked in her last convulsion; when the earth shakes off its burdens and man asks 'What may this mean?' – on that day it will proclaim its tidings, for your Lord will have inspired it.

On that day mankind will come in scattered groups to be shown their labours. Whoever does an atom's weight of good shall see it, and whoever does an atom's weight of evil shall see it also (99:1-8).

The earthquake on Doomsday will be a proclamation of the termination of the period of trial. This will mean that the freedom which people had been allotted for the purpose of their being tested has been taken away from them. Then the time will have come for people to receive their just deserts. Today the world of God appears to be silent. But when circumstances change, everything will be given the power of speech. Present-day inventions and discoveries have proved that even lifeless objects have the power of "speech." Studio performances can be fully replayed by recording sets. Similarly, the present world is as if a huge divine studio. Whatever man does or says is being preserved at every moment. And when the time comes, the story of everyone will be repeated by this world in such a way that neither great nor small sayings and doings will escape God's attention.

For the observance of proper behaviour in this world, man requires only one thing. It should be firmly embedded in his mind that he is under divine surveillance at every moment. The deeds of his entire life will be presented in the court of God. Be these great or small, done secretly or publicly, everything will be there on record.

If man is fully convinced of this reality, he will be shaken completely even before the shaking of the world. Before the all-encompassing earthquake of Doomsday he will experience an earthquake in his own soul which will change him completely. As a result, he will become his own keeper. He will adopt a disciplined life instead of a life of licence. He will use his powers as guided by the command of God instead of acting independently.

After Death

By the snorting war steeds, which strike fire with their hoofs, as they gallop to the raid at dawn, and with a trait of dust, split apart a massed army; man is ungrateful to his Lord! To this he himself shall bear witness.

And truly on account of his love of wealth he is niggardly. Is he not aware that when the dead are thrown out from their graves and men's hidden thoughts are laid open, their Lord will on that day have full knowledge of them all? (100:1-11).

The horse is an extremely faithful animal. It sacrifices itself to the uttermost for its master, even at the cost of its life.

It expresses symbolically what man should be like, i.e. that he should have faith in his Lord, just as the horse trusts its master. But in practice this does not happen.

In this world an animal is grateful to its master, but man is not grateful to his Lord. Here an animal recognises its dues to its master, but man does not do so in regard to his Lord. Here an animal is engaged devotedly in serving its master. But this is not the case with man.

Man values only that animal which is faithful to him. Then how can he fail to understand that only those will have value and importance in the eyes of God (in the Hereafter) who have proved themselves His faithful servants? It is a sad fact that love of money turns people blind, so that they fail to understand a reality already experienced in their immediate surroundings.

This state of affairs is not going to last. Death must come, reminding man that he is totally in the grip of God. Death, in actual fact, is an entrance to the next world of reckoning. There man has to appear before a divine court, where no human act is hidden from the divine eye.